

November on Duxbury Beach

Several people left me messages last week reporting Bonaparte's Gulls on Duxbury Beach. Unfortunately, I was in Venice. Did I say "unfortunately"? I drove down the beach on Friday and saw my own little gaggle of these small, beautiful gulls. Bonaparte's Gulls have a fluttery flight, like a tern and can easily be confused with terns. I know because that's what I did.



There were several Common Terns on the beach, too, so it took a little sorting to get them straight. My son-in-law suggested that maybe the Bonies flew with one wing tucked into their vest. My son-in-law has a good imagination but needs to brush up on his gull identification.

The beach has never been so lovely, streaked with rust and gold and red and bronze with the Dutch blue sea in the distance. It was hard to keep our minds on the birds. There were both kinglets at Plum Hills hanging out with lots of Song Sparrows and a few Chipping Sparrows. In the bay we found Common Eider, Red-breasted Mergansers, and a few Buffleheads. Out on the ocean we saw rafts of scoters and a single Common Loon. Along the edges of the bay several yellowlegs strode by the flocks of Sanderlings looking elegant and detached. Along with the Sanderlings were a few Black-bellied Plovers and several Dunlin poking their way across the sand, looking for lunch.

As we were driving back toward the bridge a male Northern Harrier appeared over the marsh. He was one of the "rare ones": a full-grown male with a pure white belly and gray-blue

mantle. He was a stunner! He tilted back and forth over the grasses, always searching for mice and voles. We watched him lift up and then drop into a patch of thick beach grass then up again and off over the



Duxbury Field Notes

by Fahy Higate

dunes. We talked to a man who had been keeping an eye on the harrier and he said that the hawk had flushed a Short-eared Owl earlier! Short-eared Owls are birds of the open fields and beaches and have been in serious decline recently. There used to be several of these wonderful little owls on our beach but in the past few years they have been missing more often than not. The primary threat to Short-eared Owls is the destruction and degradation of open habitat. As open fields are no longer maintained as farmland they revert to woodland or become land used for building.

The drive back home through Duxbury was nearly as beautiful as the beach. The oaks and maples blazing with color. The underbrush too in shades of russet and gold. Another one of those many reasons to keep our trees and shrubs instead of cutting them down for lawns. If every yard is a lawn how will we know it is fall?

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